

## Nurses are divided about setting staffing standards

Some say a policy is needed to ensure quality care for patients

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Statesman Journal

*March 28, 2007*

Some nurses asked lawmakers Tuesday to specify how many patients can be assigned to a registered nurse in a hospital.

Linda Boly, who works at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland, said a patient who had just left surgery went unattended for nearly an hour because all the nurses had their hands full with other patients.

"We believe hospitals will not regulate themselves," she told the House health-policy subcommittee. "We need staffing standards in place, and we also need a union to enforce safe patient standards."

Legacy Health System is not unionized. House Bill 3416 was introduced at the request of the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, AFT Local 5017, and would specify minimums based on the nature of the hospital unit.

"For the sake of patients, there needs to be enough nurses to ensure quality care," said Kathy Geroux, a registered nurse at Kaiser Permanente and the local's president.

California enacted staffing standards in 1999.

But other nurses, and the hospitals, oppose the bill.

Also opposed was Dr. Marvin Fickle, the superintendent and chief medical officer of Oregon State Hospital, who said in written testimony that it would

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require the hiring of 832 more nurses and \$60.5 million in the 2007-09 budget. The hospital has 20 percent of its registered-nurse positions vacant.

"There are far too many provisions in this complex bill that make it irreconcilable," he wrote.

The Legislature approved requirements in 2001 for hospitals to develop staffing plans and shield whistle-blowers who file complaints.

Two years ago, the Legislature approved a compromise negotiated by the Oregon Nurses Association and the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems. The law clarified use of mandatory overtime but also specified certain duties of registered nurses, and reworked the 2001 law to promote joint governance by nurses and managers.

Administrative rules put the bill into effect a couple of months ago.

"Direct-care nurses have a strong say as to what a staffing plan looks like," said Gwen Dayton, the executive vice president and general counsel for the hospitals. "We think it offers tremendous promise. We need to give it a chance before we destroy it."

Martin Taylor, who spoke for the Oregon Nurses Association, said he was a big critic of hospitals a few years ago. He said he felt awkward being on the other side of AFT, and with the hospitals.

"But on this issue, the hospital association has been doing the right thing," he said. "It would be wrong for us to do anything other than to come and testify against this bill."

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